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[unsigned] The Story of the Urbana
Free Library: Its Early Days,
1874 - 1949. —
(1949)

ILLINOIS HISTORICAL SURVEY

UNIVERSITY OF
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THE LIBRARY IN 1949 ... BY D. G. DEARING

1874

§

1949

DIAMOND ANNIVERSARY
of the
URBANA FREE LIBRARY

URBANA, ILLINOIS
1949

The Story
of the
URBANA FREE LIBRARY

§

Its Early Days

1874

1949

URBANA, ILLINOIS
1949

EIGHTEEN - SEVENTY

Written in a flowing, clerical script, a document dated October, 1872, discloses the earliest beginnings of what is now the Urbana Free Public Library.

The Free Public Library actually began its existence on July 2, 1874, but like most good things of a civic nature, it did not spring into being full-blown. Founding of the Public Library was the final result of the group effort of a band of 52 young Urbana men active in the interest of their city in the expansion era which followed the Civil War.

Urbana was a thriving little city in that post-war era. Paul Busey, in a paper read before the Rotary Club in 1933, recalled that in 1870 Urbana had a population of 5,000, with a real estate valuation of a million dollars, and personal property valuation of \$200,000.

"The Court House,, on its present site," Busey's paper continued, "had been erected in 1861 at a cost of \$40,000. Urbana City had 431 dwellings and 433 families; with 1,178 males and 1,110 females. The I.B. & W. Shops (now the New York Central Shops) had been moved here in 1870, and the same year we had a new hotel named the Griggs House, run by E. Ater, that was the best in Central, Illinois.

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"We had two banks: Busey Bros., and Ermentrout, Harvey & Co.; five dry-goods stores, one clothing store, three boot and shoe stores, grocery and drug stores; two hotels, the Griggs and the Pennsylvania House; two mills, two brick and tile factories, a machine shop, two cigar manufacturers. The rest of the town was made up of lawyers, a few being Ayers & Ayers, Somers & Wright, Cunningham & Webber, and W. M. Mathews. We had two newspapers.

"The I. B. & W. ran through the two towns (Urbana and Champaign, which until a decade since had been known as West Urbana), and we had a horse and street car running to Champaign. There were no pavements. Illumination was by gas-light. The only place of entertainment was Busey's Hall in the Busey Block on Main Street, where dances and traveling shows were the attraction."

CULTURE THEIR GOAL

Quite evidently, the progressive young men of Urbana wanted their city to be one of culture and learning. Evidently, also, this was not a new thing with the community, for there already existed here two institutions of higher learning: the Urbana Seminary, which stood on the site of the present Leal School, and the Urbana and Champaign Institute, which stood at the south-east corner of Wright and University, on what is now the northwest corner of Illinois Field.

In the year 1871 the Urbana Seminary burned and the City of Urbana built a new High School on the site. Two ward schools were built at the same time elsewhere in the city. The total cost of the three new schools was \$35,000. "During the same year," Busey wrote, "there was a revival in the Methodist Church, with an addition of 250 to their membership."

HOME OF THE U. OF I.

In the year 1868, after a severely contested rivalry with Kankakee and Ottawa, Urbana won out as the location for the Illinois Industrial University. "Through the united efforts of the citizens of Urbana, notably those (later to prove themselves) interested in the Library, this plum had been secured for Urbana by the donation of the Urbana and Champaign Institute Building, grounds and lands of about 170 acres, together with 410 acres of other lands. A further consideration was \$100,000 in Champaign County Bonds, as an endowment," Busey's account continues.

- In this atmosphere, 52 men of Urbana, ranging in ages from 18 to 25 years, in the fall of 1872 united themselves into a "Young Men's Library Association of Urbana." An item in the Champaign County Gazette of Oct. 10, 1872, states that

"nearly 40" young men by that date had placed their signatures at the bottom of the previously-mentioned document, which called for the founding of the Library Association, -- "and the prospect of the ultimate success of the enterprise is very flattering."

The document, for a time, was kept at the office of Postmaster F. M. Allen, and from time to time notices appeared in the two local newspapers urging young men of Urbana to "take a share in the Library Association by all means".

Finally, at the beginning of December, leaders of the movement decided that enough to indicate success for the project had been enlisted, and an organization meeting was called by notice in the Gazette: "Let there be a general attendance and let each one come prepared to add the full weight of his influence to this good movement". The notice was signed by F. M. Allen, J. W. Porter, and Jo. E. Hunt, as the "Committee".

On a Friday night at the beginning of December, 1872, "about 40 gentlemen met at Busey's Hall for the purpose of organizing a Young Men's Library Association. The meeting organized by electing Capt. C. D. Webster (chairman) and J. W. Porter Secretary.

LIBRARY FOR \$2500

"After a general discussion as to the most practical and feasible method of proceeding to an organization, it was decided to make it a joint-stock association, to start with a capital stock of \$2,500.00, consisting of one hundred shares at \$25.00 each."

"Messrs. Jaques, Thompson and H. M. Ayers were appointed a committee to procure from the Secretary of State a certificate of incorporation, and draft a constitution and by-laws."

"Messrs. Allen, Tiernan and Porter were appointed a committee to solicit subscriptions to the stock."

"The meeting adjourned to meet pursuant to the call of the Committee on Organization."

"A lively interest was manifested in the enterprise by all present, and we think there is no doubt that it will be a grand success," reported the County Gazette.

The "grand success" expected by the enthused Gazette reporter was not immediately forthcoming. Efforts to enlist subscribers to the stock continued through December and past the Christmas holidays. Although the \$2,500 originally sought had not been secured, the Gazette reported on

Jan. 22, 1873, that "subscriptions to the Urbana Library stock have reached the sum of \$2100, which makes the library a fixed fact."

With this amount in hand, the leaders called a meeting for permanent organization in the latter part of January, '73. On Jan. 15, it was announced that The Sons of Temperance had donated to the Library Association all the furniture contained in the Sons of Temperance lodge hall in Dr. Blackshaw's building. Whether temperance had become universal and there was no longer need for such a lodge, or whether the lodge brothers had decided that thirst for knowledge hereafter would overshadow thirsts of other kinds, is not explained.

On Thursday, Jan. 16, 1872, the meeting for permanent organization was held in Blackshaw's hall. -- "The meeting organized by electing Capt. C. D. Webster, chairman, and J. W. Porter, Secretary. The Committee on Organization reported having obtained from the Secretary of State a certificate of incorporation, which report was accepted and the certificate adopted as the Charter of the Association."

Things appeared to be rolling fast, now. Another meeting was called on the following Monday night, Jan. 20, and officers and committees for the Library

Association's first year were named. The terms of Mr. Webster, as president, and J. W. Porter, as recording secretary were fixed as one-year terms; Mr. B. Thompson was elected vice-president, S. M. Morton as corresponding secretary; F. G. Jaques (father of Miss Minnie Jaques who recently ended half a century's service as treasurer of the Free Public Library) was elected the Library's first treasurer, and Frank M. Allen was elected Librarian.

The following standing committees for the year were appointed:

Finance: H. W. Ayers, M. B. Thompson and Frank Tiernan.

Reading Room: Frank Tiernan, M. B. Thompson and Rev. S. M. Morton.

Books and Donations: C. D. Webster, Rev. S. M. Morton, F. G. Jaques, W. Sim, and J. W. Porter.

The committee on reading room was instructed to rent a room at an annual rental of \$150. The committee on finance was instructed to continue soliciting subscriptions to stock to the amount of \$3,000. The committee on books and donations was instructed to assist the corresponding secretary in soliciting donations of papers, magazines, books, and other gifts.

The name of the group apparently was changed in this meeting from the "Young

Men's Library Association of Urbana" to the "Urbana Library Association". The Gazette reported that "there was a good attendance and considerable enthusiasm was manifested by all present. The speeches made were brimful of earnestness and feeling."

The reading room was opened early in February, 1873, and for a small fee, anyone could spend an evening among the literature of the times. With each issue, the Gazette carried strongly editorialized news notes on the progress and growth of the project, exhorting the local public to patronize the place. It thoughtfully added: "In this connection we would say that it is not the intention of the Association to exclude ladies from its privileges. It is expected that they will patronize it and spend many of their evenings in its reading room, where they will find papers, magazines and periodicals of every kind and character upon the files, from the best fashion magazines in the land to the New York Ledger. The rules of the room, which are very strict against talking above a whisper, smoking, (this, of course, was directed at the men), etc., will be rigidly enforced....."

By the end of February, the Gazette was able to report that "the Library Association has received many donations of books, etc....and will cheerfully continue to

receive such as its friends may wish to bestow, and extends the request to all to bring or send any books that they may feel like parting with, to aid it in extending its usefulness. The enterprise thus far is a grand success; and to be convinced of this you have only to step into its reading-room any evening, and see how comfortable and cosy its patrons are."

On through the spring, summer and fall of 1873, and into the spring of 1874, the local press continued to beat the drum in behalf of the Library project. -- "The library reading room is the best place of resort for that large class of our population who have no place in which to pass these cold winter evenings." (This is January, 1873). "The room is warm, cheerful, well-lighted and kept perfectly quiet, so that visitors may read there with the same comfort and pleasure afforded at their own fireside, and with no expense. You will do well to improve this rare privilege."

Another item in January, 1874, tells what the people were reading those days in current periodicals: "We notice on the tables of the Library reading room among many other attractive papers and periodicals, the following: The Aldine, Atlantic Monthly, Harper's Monthly, Scribner's Magazine, The Galaxy, Harper's Weekly, Frank Leslie's Weekly, the Lakeside Monthly, Every Saturday, and the

Champaign County Gazette. What an array of luxuries for a literary feast; and the best of it is, it doesn't cost anything. All you have to do is to go up and take a comfortable seat in a cozy, pleasant room and quietly pass your evenings in real jolly solid comfort. Isn't that a better way to pass your evenings than to be sneaking about the back alleys and dark streets of the city looking after strange gods?"

In the absence of documented evidence, one may only surmise as to why, that winter, the decision was reached to make the library's operation a governmental function. In the first place, a new law had been passed by the State Legislature, to enable cities of Illinois to establish free public libraries. Although, at its inception, a plan for charging a fee for the use of the reading room had been in use, this evidently was dropped soon after the Association began business. It seems probable that the Association members soon began to feel it unreasonable for the public to depend upon a limited few to bear the expense of a service available to the entire public.

Early in the spring of 1874, a movement to have the City Government take over the Library was launched, and on July 2, that year, the Urbana Free Public Library was created by the City Council.

THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

The salient features of the progress of the Urbana Free Public Library were told by Paul Busey in his paper for the Rotary Club.

The Council of Urbana having agreed to support and maintain a free library, the Association turned over all its assets, consisting of a stove and pipe, a carpet, three tables, two book cases, 24 chairs and a few other articles, also 845 books, a few magazine subscriptions and \$126.52 in cash, to the city, then the Town, of Urbana.

At the first meeting of Directors, F. M. Russell was chosen president; and J. W. Porter secretary, the other directors being F. J. Jaques, William Sim, N. J. McConney, C. D. Webster, J. W. Hays, A. Van Tuyl, and S. M. Morton. S. H. Hood was appointed librarian.

Within a short time a complaint had been registered against Hood as librarian, but on investigation he was found competent. However, politics were too much for him, and on Oct. 20, 1874, he was removed from office. Looking around for a successor, the Board decided upon Miss Ida Hanes, and she was installed at the handsome salary of \$12.00 a month, with a bond of \$200. At the time, the periodical list of the Library consisted of Harper's Weekly, Harper's Monthly, and the Waverly magazine. These were supplemented the following year

by the Indianapolis Journal and the Scientific American. Miss Hanes' salary was raised to \$15 in February, 1875.

The first annual report was made in June of 1875. During the year, 234 volumes had been added; the attendance ran from 4 to 46 in an evening. During the 11 months, 12,225 visitors had entered its portals, or an average of 37 an evening. There were on the shelves 100 volumes of history, 38 travel, 36 of biography, 98 of religion, 121 of general literature, 100 of science and art, 405 novels and 105 juveniles, 57 poetry, 27 humorous, and 33 reference books. It is interesting to note that 3,332 novels were taken out during the year; 797 juveniles, and 545 of all other books.

In the report the following comment is made: "The books added during the past year have been mostly novels and juveniles, so that the in the accessions the demands of the patrons has been effected as nearly as could be. There may be some who object to so many novels being read, altho some of our most renowned clergymen have written of fiction; novel reading is not as much condemned as in former days.

It is interesting to find that in 1875 the Library subscribed to the following papers: Dailies, Chicago Times, Chicago Tribune and Indianapolis Journal; weeklies, Urbana Republic, Champaign County Gazette, Champaign Union; Champaign Times, Tolono

Herald, Frank Leslie's Illustrated, The Graphic, Waverly Magazine, Harper's Weekly, Harper's Baazar, New York Ledger, Scientific American, New York Weekly Mail, Chicago Legal News, Bloomington Pantagraph, Illinois State Journal, Illustrated Christian Weekly, Star in the West, Northwestern Christian Advocate, Presbyterian Banner, St. Louis Presbyterian; monthlies, St. Nicholas. Soon afterward, Harper's Monthly and Arthur's Illustrated Home Magazine were added.

In 1876 the directors contracted for a rear room on the second floor of the new building being erected by E. Gill on the corner of Race and Main, now the site of Knowlton & Bennett's store. The contract was for a room 28 by 38 feet, and the lease to run for 5 years at \$150 a year. The average income from taxation and other sources was under \$1,200, in 1874, but had been increased by several fairs and performances in Busey's Hall, across the street above what is now the Princess Theatre.

A gradual growth in the number of books on the shelves, books let out and visitors at the library, increased to such an extent that in 1894 there were 29,720 visitors, 15,256 books taken out, of which 8,409 or over were fiction and 3,734 were juvenile.

During the year the Library was moved from the Gill building to the City build-

ding; Miss Hanes still being the Librarian at a salary of \$20. There were a total of 4,237 books on the shelves.

It is interesting to note at this point that a tradition seemed to have developed of making the office of director a life job. Of the directors serving in 1874, all had either died or were still in office in 1894. In 1886 James Thorpe was appointed a member; in 1888 William Saf-fel; in 1890 George Bennett, all were still on the Board when their deaths occurred, after 45 or more years' service.

QUEST FOR A HOME

The first move toward establishment of a Library Building took place in 1912, when the Board purchased two lots on High street. These lots later being found unsatisfactory, the Board later was able to trade them in, with the help of a small bond issue from the City, for the lots where the Library Building now stands.

About this same time, the passage of the two mill tax law began to give the Board some hope that they might have a home of their own, in the future. Andrew Carnegie was approached on a proposal that he endow construction of a building, but turned it down.

There seemed little hope of a building until in 1917 Mrs. Mary E. Busey was heard

to remark that she had been thinking of making some form of memorial to her late husband, Gen. Samuel T. Busey. She was approached by members of the Library Board and agreed to give the sum of \$35,000 to be used in erection of a suitable library building in Urbana.

When plans were perfected by Architect Joseph W. Royer and bids were received, it was found that although the sum would erect the building, several things such as stacks and equipment had not been provided for. Luckily, the Board had laid aside a considerable sum from their appropriations, looking toward a new building, and by the use of this, and borrowing from their book fund, endowed by F. E. Eubeling, they were able to complete the amount necessary. A. W. Stoolman was awarded the contract, and the Board, looking to the future growth, bought the '22 feet adjoining the Library on the west.

As a further contribution to the Library, Mrs. Busey contracted with Nicholas Brewer of the City of New York, one of the foremost modern painters, for a portrait of her husband. The portrait hangs over the loan desk.

Soon after the completion of the Library Building, Miss Hanes resigned on account of poor health, and Miss Marjorie Hutchins was appointed Librarian in her place.

BOOKS READ

In 1879 people in Urbana probably read:

- ALDRICH: Marjorie Daw
- DICKENS: "Mystery" of Edwin Drood
- HOWELLS: Chance Acquaintance
- TWAIN: Gilded Age
- WALLACE: Fair God

In 1899 they were reading:

- CHURCHILL: Richard Carvel
- DELAND: Old Chester Tales
- JOHNSTON: To Have and To Hold
- PAGE: Red Book

In 1924 they were reading:

- CATHER: Lost Lady
- FERBER: So Big
- HURST: Lumox

In 1949 they are reading:

- BARNES: White Collar Zoo
- CALDWELL: Let Love Come Last
- MERTON: Seven Storey Mountain
- SHEEN: Peace of Soul
- STREETER: Father of the Bride

In 1874 there were 1,100 books in our Library: Today there are 39,000.

In 1874 the population of Urbana was about 5,000; today it is about 18,000.

SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS OF GROWTH OF THE URBANA PUBLIC LIBRARY

	1875	1900	1925	1949
Book collection	1,120	8,037	28,330	39,409
Book circulation	5,086	23,559	44,760	90,463
Circulation per borrower	7.2	15.1
Circulation per capita	2.2	4.1	4.3	6.4
Population	2,942	5,728	10,244	14,064*
Total receipts	\$197	\$1,859	\$6,280	\$18,204
Total expenditures	\$404	\$1,077	\$5,818	\$18,873
Book expenditures	\$67	\$353	\$1,002	\$2,634
Salary of Librarian	\$150	\$330	\$1,080	\$2,700 <u>3%</u>

*U. S. Census, 1940

YOUR GIFT WOULD HELP

In 1947 John DeFerrari gave the Boston Public Library a million dollars, and in 1948 he gave the same library an additional half-million dollars. You probably have read of this remarkable gift. We realize that there aren't many persons who are able to give such sums as that. Still, if users of the Urbana Free Library understood some of its needs, perhaps many would like to make it lesser gifts.

In 1911 F. E. Eubeling left the Urbana Library \$10,000 as a trust fund. The interest on this money can be used for the purchase of books.

In 1917 Judge J. O. Cunningham gave his library. Mrs. Mary T. Busey gave \$35,000 for the present building. Homer Stilwell gave \$1,000 for the purchase of the site.

During the current year Harold Walker and Lewis D. Griffet have each given to the Library subscriptions to periodicals.

In gifts to your library, there is a splendid opportunity for Urbana residents to give service to the whole community.

THESE THINGS NEEDED

Following are some of the things your Library needs, and some projects which its income cannot provide:

A film collection and a record collection would be desirable for use of borrowers, but could be provided only by increased funds.

It needs room to house our local history collection, which is growing, our Cunningham collection, and our rare books.

A record player and a radio would help with Mrs. Fiske's programs for children, as well as the Library's work with adults.

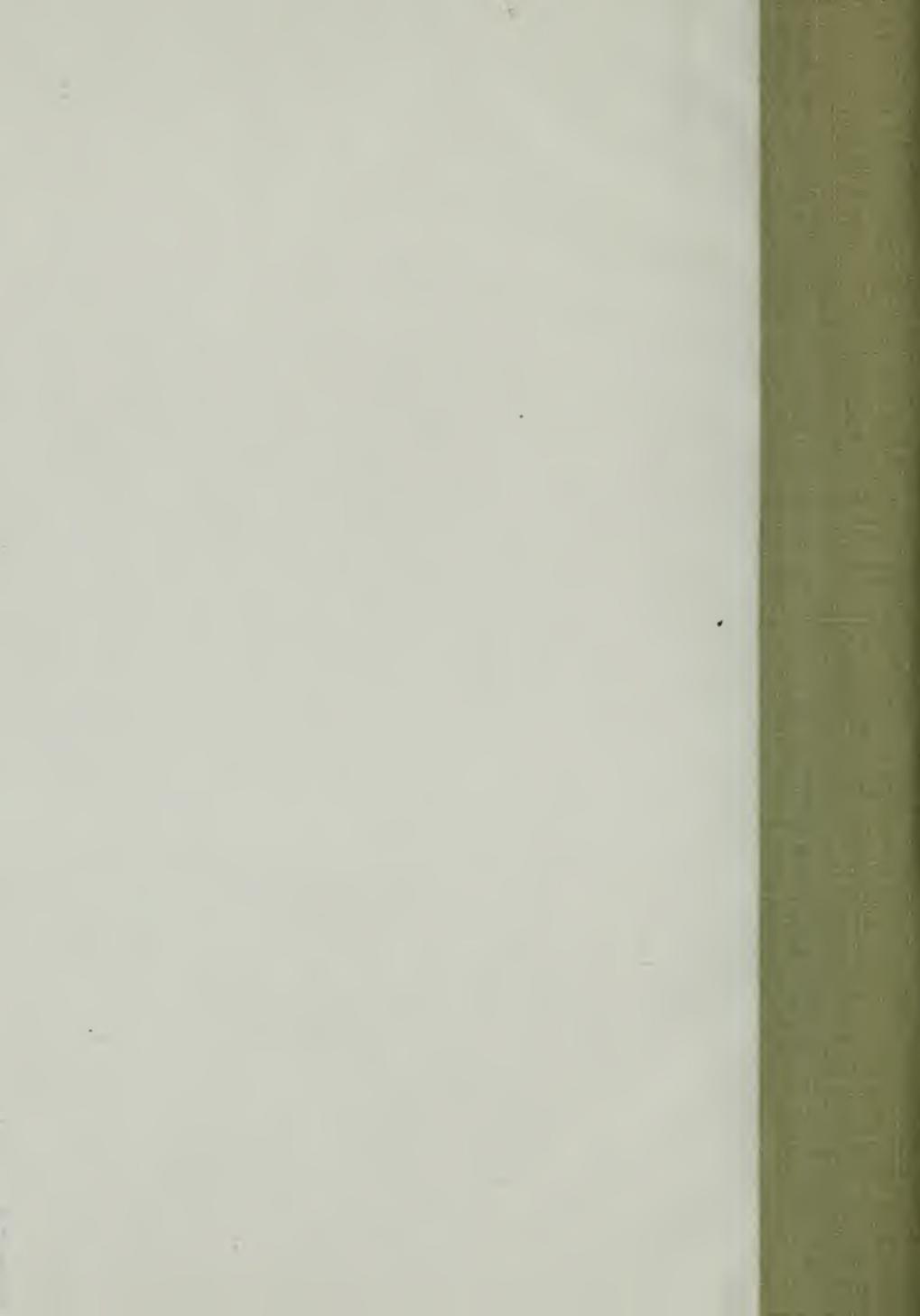
DIRECTORS - 1874

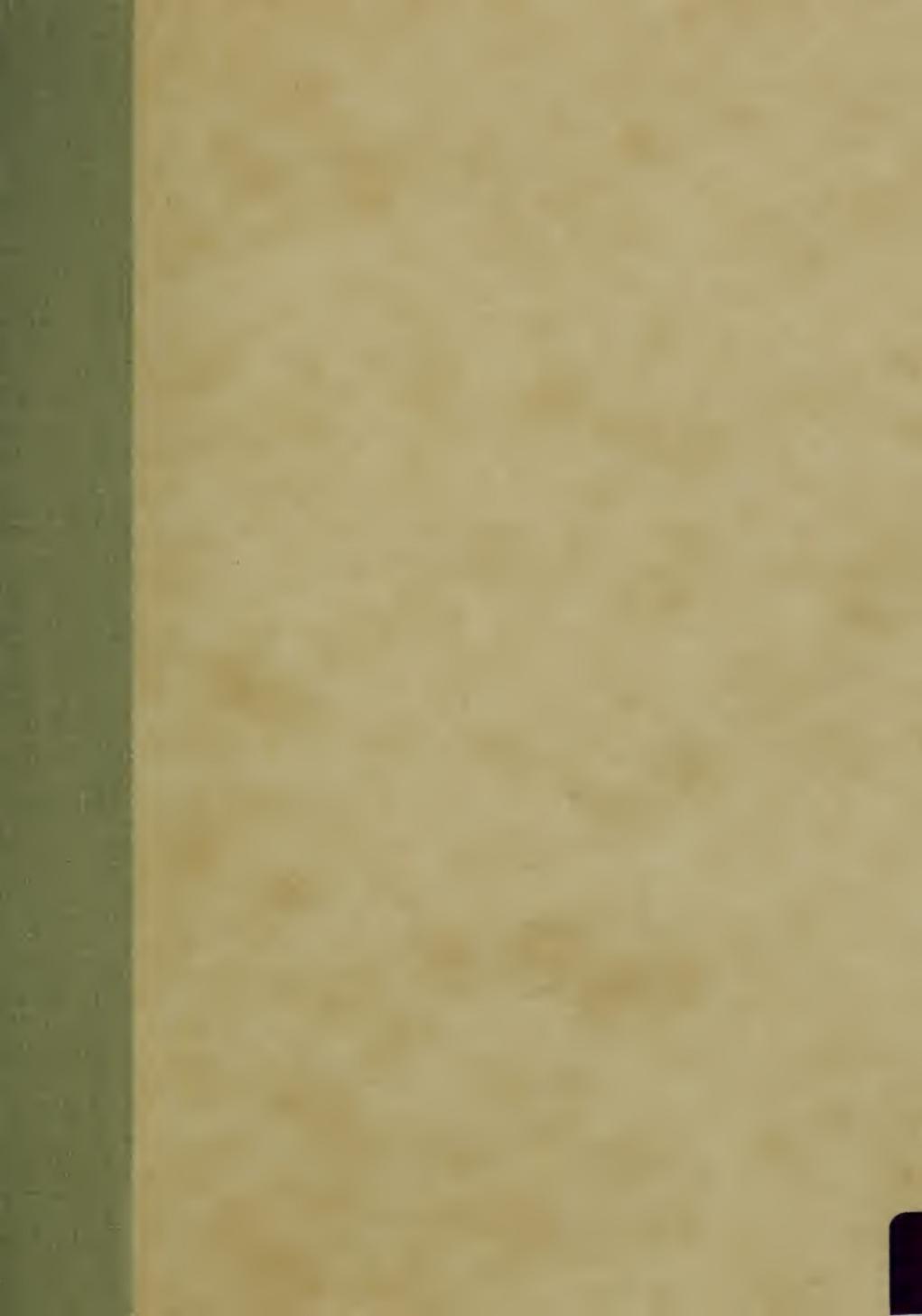
Besore, George	1874-1901
Hays, J. W.	1874-1918
Jaques, Frank	1874-1896
McConhey, N. J.	1874
Norton, S. M.	1874
Porter, Jasper W.	1874-1889
Russell, H. M.	1874-1909
Sim, William	1874-1884
Sutton, W. T.	1874-1879
Van Tuyl, Abram	1874-1878
Webster, C. D.	1874-1887

DIRECTORS - 1949

Bigler, Harry E.
Bosley, Frank A.
Browne, Robert B.
Corrie, Mrs. L. L.
Phillips, Enos L.
Tawney, Mrs. Guy
Waxler, K. M.
Wheeler, Mrs. Parker
Windsor, P. L.







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